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Preface

In the past fifteen years I have travelled extensively within Europe to help organizations with the design and implementation of different processes of organizational development. The challenges my clients faced were of a great variety. Some companies wanted to develop new products and services. Others started cooperating with new foreign partners and wanted to turn this cooperation into a success. Yet other organizations were in a struggle for survival and needed to find new ways to maintain their economical sustainability. What all of these assignments had in common, is that they involved a combination of strategy, process design and human interaction. In other words, we tried to answer the questions: “What do we want, how do we get there and how do we make that work with the people involved?”

After fifteen years of working on these questions, of making plans, meeting people and bridging cultures, the thing that strikes me most is the absence of another fundamental question. Whenever I ask: “Do you believe in what you are doing?” or, alternatively, “What do you believe in?”, people first react surprised, but then interesting things start to happen.

We may discover that the strategies that have been prepared extensively do not create any enthusiasm with the people who need to execute them. Or we discover that people push themselves to give 200% of their energy at work, but still feel they leave the best they have to offer (for instance their creativity, empathy or their critical outlook) at home because there is supposedly ‘no room for that kind of stuff’ in the workplace. On the brighter side, it has been great to discover that the mere question of what people believe in, can point you in the direction of powerful new ideas, strategies and approaches.

In a world that asks for our daily commitment, dedication and full energy, it is surprising that questions relating to our beliefs are not asked more often. There is a good reason to change that: it is easier to dedicate our energy to something we believe in – a fact that has been scientifically proven. Our level of energy will be higher, our efforts will be more focused and the probability of our success will be higher.

The question of what we believe in sets us in the direction of topics like faith, hope, beliefs and values. Issues that may at first sight seem to belong more to religion than to a professional environment. In the next pages, I hope to explain that it helps individuals and organizations to have a clear and real framework of values that represent the things they truly believe in. Clarifying beliefs and values can help us build stronger organizations with a lasting, unique identity and a real sense of integrity. Moreover, an effective dialogue on beliefs and values can help us to better manage the cultural Babylon that most organizations have become. We often remain unaware of the fact that our different backgrounds (both professionally and geographically) account for different convictions, beliefs and values. We may find ourselves using the same words as our colleagues, only to discover along the line that we used different definitions and interpretations. It helps to get to know more about the values of the others and ourselves.

This document is directed at anyone who guides a group of people (anything from 10 to 150,000) and who wants to create value based on values. There are many reasons to make sure that the ideological foundation of your organization is strong and real. Integrity, competitiveness, profitability and efficiency are among those reasons. The main reason, however, is that organizations have become important pillars of our society. Therefore, if we strive to make our organizations a better place, we improve the world we live in. That alone should suffice to start and maintain a real dialogue on beliefs and values.

Context and personal motivation: freedom of choice reaching its limits

As a kid in the 1970's I was always surprised by the attitude of my grandparents. Their lives spanning two world wars, they were self-made people with a strong appetite for life and adventure. I was amazed by their sense of exploration and learning. They never stopped exploring: my grandmother started a course on computer science in her late seventies because she did not want 'time to pass her by'. And it never did. At the same time, these people had a very strong Calvinist work ethic. "First the necessary, then the useful, then the pleasant" was something my grandmother used to say whenever tough choices had to be made.

What I did not realize at the time was how strong our (Dutch) society was impregnated with some fundamental Christian values. As a kid from a catholic father and a protestant mother, my parents decided to raise us in an ecumenical way. Principles were important, whether they came from Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Humanism or any other spiritual or religious school much less so.

Now, forty-something years along the line, my own generation is at the helm of many organizations, both public and private. And we often seem to be at a loss for values. Many people in the free post-war Western world have been raised with a great freedom of choice and that is a wonderful thing. However, the clear moral framework my grandparents grew up with also had its advantages. It provided a sense of direction that you could either conform to or rebel against. Whatever direction you chose, at least it got you thinking. And my generation may have been thinking a lot about society and about our own possibilities, thinking and talking about values seems to have become a process we are less familiar with. Because of political developments, some people even feel downright uncomfortable to publicly discuss values any more.

In the course of the twentieth century, most Western societies had a power balance between capital owners and worker's representatives. Beneath this power balance, capitalism took off in an environment where every person involved was raised with a clear set of values. Max Weber went so far as to say that capitalism could only take off because of the prevailing Calvinist work ethic that my grandparents had as well. In any case, your place in society and your sympathies determined whether you ended up on the socialist or capitalist side – or somewhere in the middle.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the power balance in society seems to be less clear. Although the balance between capital and workers' interests is still relevant, a lot of other denominators have entered into the equation. Globalization, environmental issues, distribution of wealth, access to food, raw materials and energy sources: some of these issues may not be new, but the urgency linked to them is unprecedented. Now where does this leave us as individuals?

A hopeful development in our brave new world is that many people are looking for a sense of purpose in their lives, both professional and private. Instead of turning to religion for answers, many people have established their own faith, be it in a yoga-type spirituality, charity or community work, sports or even consumerism. 'Shopping therapy' is an established concept and every manager who is worth his (or her) money has been through some serious coaching or counseling.

The fact of the matter, however, remains that today's world is largely run by a generation that has been raised with freedom of choice as a guiding principle. We may not be comfortable or experienced with a dialogue on values, but if we want to create a moral framework for today's society, we had better start reinventing ourselves. The market economy provides a basis many people still hold dear today, but without a power balance, without a real, valid and contemporary moral compass to guide us, the system has proven to easily go overboard. Integrity issues abound. Thinking that more rules or codes of conduct will fix this problem, is an error to mistake the map for the territory.

If this process doesn't start from within each and everyone one of us, it risks to remain a superficial exercise. Therefore, if we want the process of reinventing ourselves to be successful, we should make it personal. Organizations may have values, but organizations are groups of people with a common purpose. If the common purpose itself or the link the individuals have with this purpose is not crystal clear, any effort to safeguard the integrity of an organization becomes a struggle. And that is exactly what seems to be happening today.

Starting this process from within is not difficult provided that you know how to create a safe environment. You get started by asking yourself what your personal values are and then start sharing them with your colleagues. During my experience in the past fifteen years, discussing personal values of employees, managers and executives has been a constant celebration of diversity. Participants to value workshops are often amazed how interesting and different their personal stories are. This is the fabric that makes organizations thrive, because diversity is the best remedy against blind spots. A second surprise to many participants is how easy it becomes to agree on a set of common values once you have taken the time to reflect on your own values and share them with your colleagues. Once you know the color of the glasses you and you colleagues are wearing, it becomes easier to develop a joint perspective on the world.

The process of exchanging personal values and defining common values may differ, depending on the kind of organization you run, its size, its geographical spread and its field of activity. For a small organization in one place this process can be pretty straightforward. For some sectors, the values beneath everyday work are dictated more by regulations and safety procedures than by the motivation of individual employees. And discussing values with 150,000 employees worldwide may be a time-consuming process. However, creating opportunities to make sure that every employee knows how their own values relate to the common purpose and challenges of their organization is almost always an option.

In my experience, we should not shy away from a fundamental dialogue on values in organizations. The process leads to a stronger identification of employees with the organization they work for – and a stronger awareness of executives of the human capital they have to safeguard. Along the road is energy and fueled commitment. Most of all, the road leads to the joy of working with a diverse group of people on common goals that are of benefit not only to our bank accounts but also to our hearts.

How values work – and why they matter

Let's start with a definition. The Oxford English Dictionary defines values as "principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life". In my opinion, these are not two alternative definitions: If you read this definition as one phrase, values are the principles and standards that you judge and decide to make important in your life. The question "What do you believe in?" may not literally refer you to someone's values, my experience is it will point you in the right direction.

Upon asking what he believed in, one Italian client of mine was quick to answer that he believed in numbers and in the measurability of performance. Upon closer inspection, he admitted that for him concreteness was extremely important, as well as the reliability of the delivery. He needed the clarity of a good planning & control cycle and the reliability of his people in delivering the forecasted results. For him, concreteness and reliability were part of his personal values.

Another (Mexican-American) client told me that for her, a high level of energy and a sense of 'fun' in her organization were essential. In her views, the needs of the organization and her personal needs were one and the same thing. For her, slowness equaled boredom, and speed or dynamism was critical for her performance and job satisfaction: she really came to life whenever things got hectic. Swiftness was one of her personal values, as was enjoying life. Of course, it helped her to see that for the organization as a whole, a combination of dynamism and stability would be much more effective. This balance also literally represented the best of both worlds for this company: the go-get mentality of the American mother company and the thoroughness of its European subsidiaries.

The point here is that in almost any case, if you listen closely, you can distill the personal values from an answer to the question 'what do you believe in?' If your beliefs are the ingredients on the kitchen counter, your values are the dish you have decided to make with them. The two examples show that what people believe in or what they find important can be very personal and very different from one person to the next. How to best manage this diversity is a subject we will discuss later on.

Now, why are values essential? You can tell from the definition that values are determined by what we find important. It also works the other way round: Our values, once established, determine how we think and act. They constitute the compass that drives our behavior, whether we are aware of it or not. And if this compass is not known, it is like having a roadmap and a car, but not knowing how to determine what North and South are. You may know where you want to go, but it is not likely that you will get there if you cannot establish a sense of direction.

Of course, values are important as the moral backbone of any society. That is the reason that every constitution or anthem is full of them. In addition, I have discovered that knowing your values as an individual and as an organization - and knowing how they fit together - can contribute significantly to your success and your wellbeing, both as individuals and as organizations. The related advantages fall down into four categories:

- Knowing which values drive you as an **individual**, will help you to
 - o Know what is essential for your own motivation at work
 - o Maintain your own energy level by creating optimal conditions for yourself
 - o Know how your own biases color the way you see other people
 - o Be clear, transparent and fair in your expectations with regard to other people

- Knowing the personal values of **other individuals** you work or live with, helps you to
 - o Understand better why other people think what they think and do what they do
 - o Cooperate more effectively, by building on a variety of personal values
 - o Determine the cause of (potential) conflict and 'agree to disagree'
 - o Find a common language to deal with different insights

- Knowing the values that apply to **your organization as a whole** helps you to
 - o define the ideological identity (the ‘soul’) of your organization
 - o determine and communicate what distinguishes your organization from competitors
 - o determine how your values relate to those of your stakeholders (clients, shareholders etc.) and adapt your approaches accordingly
 - o know what behavior you value as a group and what behavior you penalize

- Knowing the **relationship between your personal values and those of your organization** can help you to
 - o know how you fit in and in what way you (can) distinguish yourself
 - o decide whether this is the right place and the right challenge for you
 - o decide whether you want to stand up for something and add value to your organization
 - o determine in what way you can contribute to the (integrity of the) organization

Knowing your own personal values, those of your colleagues and those of your organization, and knowing how these things fit together, gives us insight in what our own and our collective motivations are. If our work and our way of working is in line with our values, we will feel in the right place and things will move along with relative ease. If, as individuals, we know each other’s values, we will understand each other better and cooperate more effectively. If as an organization we really agree on a set of shared values, we know what sets us apart and will know how to behave accordingly.

If, on the other hand, there is a conflict of values, this may lead to indignation. This situation, which literally implies a violation of our dignity (which is in turn determined by our values), may lead to a loss of energy and commitment, and consequently resignation. It may also, in a more positive way, fuel the will to stand up and fight for something, depending on the person and circumstances.

We will discover that it pays off to know your own values, those of your colleagues and your stakeholders, and to determine which values bind you as an organization. Before we go into the process of accomplishing that, I would like to explain a little about the different types of values.

The difference between values, qualities, competencies and skills

Each individual has a number of different values, qualities, competencies and skills. Although they are often mixed up, it is useful to know the difference between these concepts. This is a good way to tell them apart:

A value	is something that typifies what I	consider important
A quality	is something that typifies what I	am
A competency or skill	is something that typifies what I	can do

The main thing that sets a value apart is that there is a moral or ethical judgment involved. Based on your own conscience, you make a choice. In the end, you yourself can decide that something is important for you. You may like the qualities and competencies you have or you may have neutral feelings about them. When your values are involved, however, you are not willing to compromise and if they are violated, the emotional result - as said - is usually indignation. Somebody may be firm (a quality) or good at negotiating (a skill or competency) but that doesn’t explain whether this person finds these aspects important or not. They may be useful in one context and less so in another. If, however, somebody has the personal value of respecting their own integrity in the sense of standing up for themselves, not doing so would immediately imply a violation of their values.

The distinction is particularly important because of the attachment of judgment and therefore emotion. If a Belgian person (who cherishes discretion as a value) and a Dutch person (with openness as a value) interact, it is possible that they violate each other's values without knowing what really went wrong. The Belgian will see the Dutchman as blunt and the Dutchman will see the Belgian as evasive. They each have their own moral standards and unconsciously wish for the world to be organized in line with those principles.

The distinction is also important because in certain cultures, because of the prevailing values, certain qualities and competencies may be considered more important than in other cultures. In the United States, for instance, equality is a value that has been defined as long back as in the Declaration of Independence. Based on this value, a low-threshold way of communicating is considered an asset and even a 'must'. Americans are great at explaining complicated concepts in simple words – and they may expect you to be capable of doing the same.

Individual and collective values

In the examples I gave at the beginning of this chapter, you could see that the two executives I talked to had a clear idea of what was important to them. Both of them had a tendency to assume that what was important for them, was also important for everybody else – without checking their assumptions. This is a human tendency but also one of the biggest mistakes we can make - in particular if we are in a position of authority. Individual values are extremely subjective, even if they are strongly determined by where we come from. You can easily say, that to a certain extent, different individuals will always have different values. The interesting challenge with a group of individuals is to build on the diversity of their individual values whilst at the same time building a sense of a joint identity by discovering the collective values they have in common.

The main thing to keep in mind at this point, is that it is always useful to ask yourself the question: are we talking about **my** values, **your** values or **our** values? Those may be three different conversations and it pays off to have all three of them – one at a time.

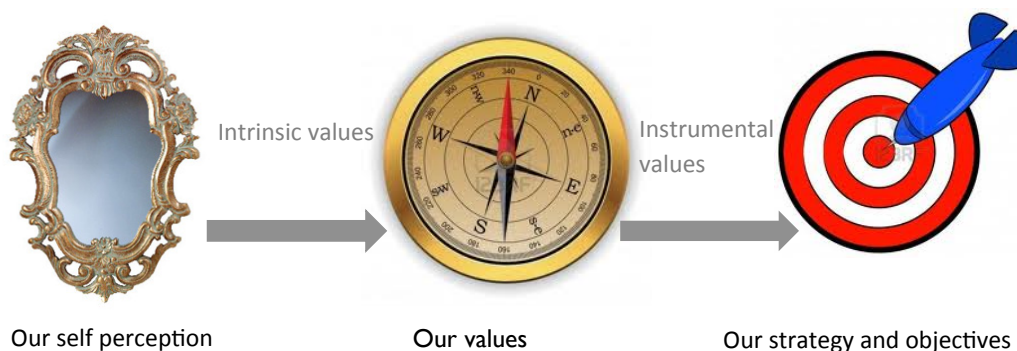
The other thing you should keep in mind is that, because of our individual values, we will have a tendency to use different definitions when talking about the same thing. In a dialogue between an Italian executive and his team, the value of respect was discussed. They all said to agree on the importance of respect, but they didn't seem to agree very much on whether it was practiced successfully in everyday working life. When the conversation became a bit fuzzy, I asked Gianni, the CEO, to explain how he defined respect. He said: "Well, for me, it's simple. Respect means that if we agree together on executing a certain plan, people honor their commitment and deliver as promised". I tried to summarize his point by saying that, if I listened well, for him respect meant true commitment and reliability. That was exactly what he meant and he was happy that at last words were given to what was vital to him. I then asked his team whether this was also how they defined respect. They answered that they could understand Gianni's definition, but that for them, respect meant that they were asked and trusted for their professional opinion. Respect meant that their boss and colleagues would ask for their opinion, listen to it while they answered and explain afterwards what they had done with their advice. I commented that, if I understood it well, for them, respect meant to be taken seriously and to be listened to. They agreed that this was what they meant.

My next question to them was whether for their company, respect should be defined in Gianni's way or in the way his management team defined it. They agreed that both things were equally important **for the company** even if the two definitions held different importance for them personally. This is exactly how it works with individual and collective values and the interesting thing is: values come alive through these types of dialogue. It is not a joint definition – because to a certain extent these people *agreed to disagree* – but the exchange of ideas that brought the value of respect to life.

Intrinsic and instrumental values

Values can be different in orientation. They can either come from within ('be part of your DNA'), or they can serve a higher purpose. Values that come from within and typify who you are, are called intrinsic values. Values that help you to achieve a certain higher goal or objective, are called instrumental values. These categories do not necessarily exclude each other, but they are different in nature. It is the difference between 'who we are' and 'what we need'.

Intrinsic and instrumental values



Niels-Peter van Doorn
INTEGRITY CLARITY VITALITY CREATIVITY

The example of a Swiss-Dutch joint venture in the pharmaceutical industry may help to clarify this point. In this industry, meticulousness (or precision) is extremely important when conducting clinical (test) trials. If trials and the necessary production of substances is not documented in the most careful manner, years of work can go to waste. In this particular joint venture, precision was considered essential, necessary and therefore could be seen as an instrumental value. In the way the work was approached, however, you could see a difference between the Swiss and the Dutch people involved. For the Swiss, calm precision is in their DNA. This DNA may have been determined by centuries of a relatively isolated society in the mountains, where life is dictated by nature and a rash decision can cost you your life in the form of a slipping rock or an avalanche. In this light, it is not that strange that the Swiss get upset when work is done in a sloppy way, because they feel their sense of precision is violated. The Dutch, on the other hand, come from a culture where 'getting the job done' is the dominant factor. They have a reputation for reliability and maintain good quality standards, but their history is based on jointly combating the sea. When the dikes break, you tend to hurry. For Dutch people, quiet precision can be learned, but it is rarely an intrinsic value as with the Swiss. The dominant value in The Netherlands would probably be called pragmatism. Of course, these differences accounted for many differences in insight. Knowing them was the first step towards a more effective cooperation.

Reality and ambition: realized and aspired values

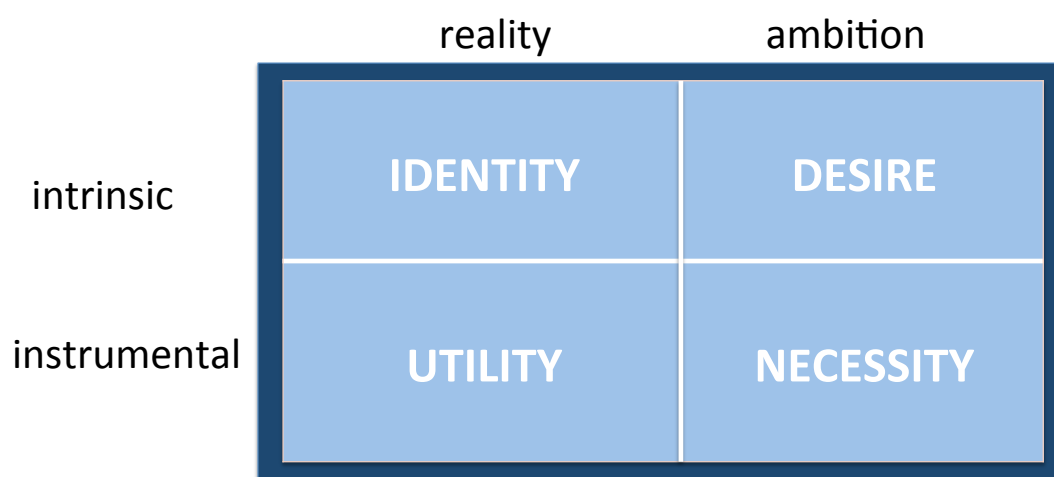
At a certain point, we may have identified a value for ourselves or for our organization. The interesting thing is that, from this point onwards, most people start talking about this value as if it is already a real thing, put to practice, part of everyday life. “In our company, we are all entrepreneurs” was an important message a client CEO gave to his people during a video broadcast of his annual strategic presentation. His message created a lot of confusion, because everybody in this organization – a recently privatized government institute in Sweden – could easily see that entrepreneurship was the exact thing lacking in the organization. What was going wrong?

The CEO and management team had defined a new corporate strategy and had also spent some time thinking about the values and behavior that were necessary to deliver on this strategy. This in itself had been an extremely useful exercise. Understandably, the CEO wanted to paint his vision for the future of his organization and entrepreneurship was an important part of that picture. The two questions they forgot to answer were these: “What is already there, what is the current reality, and what do we want to develop, what is our ambition?”

Mixing these two things up or not making the distinction at all is a problem for a number of reasons. In general, people like and need to be seen and appreciated for who and what they are today. This company, with a predominantly Swedish organizational culture, excelled at reliability, consistency and quality in the way they delivered their work. Those were the things the CEO would definitely not want to get rid off. It helps to make that point – and explicitly say what the values are today that you want to maintain. The things he wanted to add – entrepreneurship, innovation and a capacity to seize new opportunities – were equally important, but they represented more of an ambition than a current reality. It works best to be honest about that as well.

Looking in the mirror at this point and being completely honest about what you see can be difficult, but it is extremely important. What we usually see is something like the following:

The mirror of values



The mirror of values

This mirror of values combines two of the distinctions explained before in this chapter. On the vertical axis is the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values. On the horizontal axis, the distinction between reality and ambition. It thus provides an image of who we are (identity) and who we want to be (desire). It also shows us how we need to work today (utility) and how we need to work tomorrow (necessity) to accomplish what is important for us.

Discussing this mirror will often prove that people have different ideas about what is the current reality and about what is still ambition. This is partly due to the fact that top management is usually a couple of steps ahead in the strategic planning process – but may be less in touch with the current status quo on the work floor. A neutral framework like this mirror (for the mirror does not judge; it merely reflects the current situation) helps to have an open dialogue about values at different organizational levels and across different business functions.

You may also disagree on which values are intrinsic and which ones are instrumental. To explain this difference of opinion, you may find yourself in a similar situation as the Swiss-Dutch joint venture described on page 9. Remember, often where you stand depends on where you sit. What you see is determined at least partly by who you are. It is the exchange of ideas that matters most, and in this exchange your values – both as individuals and as an organization – will come to life.

Of course, the mirror of values can also be used at a personal level. This can be quite a confrontation as well. At a certain age (usually around forty) we start asking ourselves which values really belong to us and which ones have been ‘imprinted’ by our parents, teachers and role models. This requires a personal reflection on the difference between intrinsic and instrumental values. I will give you an example of my own. At a young age, my father pushed me to be more disciplined in order to prepare me for adult life. For that, I thank him because it has served me well. Exactly that, as a matter of fact: ‘served’ as an instrumental value. On the other hand, I have been happy to inherit the sense of exploring, curiosity and autonomy from my grandmother. Things that I gladly call my own (intrinsic values) and hope to for the rest of my life. Honestly looking in the mirror of desires and necessities will give you an idea of the moral standards that will help you with your next steps in life. The right part of the mirror of values will often move you out of your comfort zone, but that is only one more reason to closely observe it.

Values and their counterweights

People have a tendency to be one-sided in their development, both as individuals and in their organizations. The (newly appointed) Swedish CEO I quoted on page 10, wanted to shift the focus of his company towards more entrepreneurship. He risked to “throw away the baby with the bathing water”: by solely focusing on entrepreneurship (and forgetting about what was already there) he could lose the reliability and quality that had been painstakingly built. A one-sided focus often works for a limited period of time, and then things start all over again in a pendulum movement. A company that moves from a focus on quality towards a focus of cost-awareness, risks future quality issues if they are not very careful. An individual who moves from a harmonious relationship to a very adventurous one, may long for some quiet along the line.

When discussing values, it is useful to ask yourself the question: “If this is important for me/us, what else do we need to make sure we have a balanced approach?” Often, intrinsic values require an instrumental value to stay effective and vice versa. My personal life is an example, where the value (and the energy) of exploring is focused and ‘tamed’ by the value of discipline. And my Mexican-American client discovered that her organization could better benefit from her swiftness and sense of fun, if it could maintain its own thoroughness and stability. In the world of values, it is usually “and/and” and not “either/or”.

Observations and recommendations

On the previous pages, and based on my experiences in the past years, I have tried to describe some characteristics of values and some lessons learned on how to develop them. I have also tried to emphasize the importance of knowing your own personal values, that they influence your energy levels and that it helps to be aware of how they color your vision. After gaining such self knowledge, it is useful to get to know more about the values of the people you work or live with. You may have things in common, and almost surely you will also have some personal values that are different. Exchanging ideas on this subject will help you improve the way you cooperate and will also help you to avoid or resolve conflicts.

If you have first taken the time to get to know yourself and your colleagues a bit better in this way, the process afterwards of defining a set of company values takes on a wholly different shape. Any values that you may have in common or that you may wish to develop together, will be embedded in a system where thinking about values and asking how you relate to those values, is already starting to become a habit. Values do not come to life by writing them down, by putting them on the wall or on by mentioning them on your website. They come to life by reflecting on a personal level and by exchanging views, definitions and ideas with other people.

So where do you go from here? I would like to make four additional observations about what I have seen in organizations when things were put to practice. These observations may be relevant for you as well. Based on those observations, I will make four recommendations on how to proceed.

Observation 1

Senior managers are usually extremely competent on business topics but often much less so on human aspects, in particular where their own personalities are concerned. They often don't have a clue about the effect of their own personal values on their own behavior, their choices and their expectations. They also do not realize how strongly their personal values determine the culture of their organization. They sometimes apply their own 'hobby horses' as universally valid principles to the organization. – without being aware of it. Usually nobody dares to oppose them or they will not need to, since many managers surround themselves with people they can trust, and those are often people with similar views and values. This situation poses a strong risk of blind spots – of thinking you're on the right track when in fact you are missing vital signals.

Recommendation 1 – Look in the mirror and appoint a court jester

Step 1 in any process of developing company values is that top management reflects on its own personal values and carefully checks in what ways these values coincide or differ from the existing and necessary organizational values. Step 2 is that they organize their own 'opposition', and that somebody who is part of their team has the mandate, the faith and the competencies to challenge them. Such a court jester is necessary to actively check whether daily business decisions and behavior are in line with the company values.

Observation 2

Officially, most organizations celebrate diversity in terms of cultural background, gender and personalities. The reality is that most people feel most comfortable with people they can easily relate to – and those are the people with similar or compatible values. Diversity takes an effort, both in planning it and in making it work. Managers rarely take enough time to really ask themselves what combination of personalities, backgrounds, values and cultures would best serve their business objectives. Business objectives require a balanced team, and that means a team with variety.

Once diversity is in place, relating to people who are different from yourself is not as easy as it sounds. It requires a genuine interest in other people. It also requires that you do not feel the need to change yourself or the other person. In brief, it requires that you ask questions and that you try to listen to the answers and fully understand them. That's all, but that is very difficult for most people.

Recommendation 2 – Make sure your team is diverse – and explore the differences

When putting a new team together or when planning the execution of a new strategy, think up front about the best combination of personalities, backgrounds, values and cultures and put your team together accordingly. Once you get started, take the time to get to know each other and to know each other's values. Exchange stories, ideas and definitions and be aware that the focus is usually not 'either/or' but 'and/and'. Also, do this at a point in time when there is no excessive tension or stress. You will lay a basis of trust you can build on when then the going gets tough.

Observation 3

Organizations often create a set of company values as an afterthought. Once the organization, the strategy and the work processes are in place, they think about company values – or commission somebody else to design them for them. Thus, company values become a 'project' for HR or for the compliance department. As a result, those are also the only departments who show any kind of ownership for the company values. Research has proven that in organizations that are successful in the long run, everybody who works there has a strong sense of the company's ideological identity – and their own commitment to that identity.

Recommendation 3 – Start with the values, and make a connection between individual and company values

In any strategic reorientation process, start with the values. Try to define who you are and who you want /need to be in terms of values. Then define what, based on those values and the needs of the market, your purpose or mission should be. If you then develop a new strategy, it will have a strong foundation and can really distinguish you from your competitors. Make sure every employee is actively involved in reflecting on the connection between his/her personal values and the company values. This will result in much more active ambassadors for the company.

Observation 4

Many people work at a pace and with a quantity of daily information that does not allow them to ask any fundamental questions along the way. A number of retired CEO's have mentioned to me that they were amazed to discover – after retirement - in what a 'daze' they had lived through the most important years of their career. Information intensity is a fact of life. But so is the need to ask vital questions. During weekends and holidays, we tend to shift down and find a rhythm where it is easier to decide how we feel about fundamental issues. This state of mind is also accessible during normal work days, but it requires that we consciously dedicate a little time to it – every day.

Recommendation 4 – Reflect daily on values and slow down to speed things up

Plan your weeks and/or your days either individually or as a team. Have fifteen minute sessions for this purpose at the beginning of the week or the day. First, take five minutes to list the most important 'what' and 'when'. Then take five minutes to establish ownership or action responsibility (the 'who'). In the last five minutes, go through your personal values (if you plan individually) or your company values (if you plan as a team) to decide on the 'How'. Your values will help you to tackle the 'what' in a way that better fits you and/or your team.

Conclusions

The four recommendations listed before are suggestions. Please try them and use them to your advantage and forget those that do not apply to you or that do not work for you. There is only one firm recommendation I would like to make to all of you. If there is ANY follow-up you should give to reading this document, do the following:

Start asking the questions “Do I/we believe in this” and/or “What do we believe in” to yourself and to other people on a regular basis. Take the time to reflect personally on your own answers. Also, regularly take the opportunity to exchange ideas with other people on this subject.

As a conclusion, I would like to go into one aspect of working on values that I have not yet touched upon, but that may have been among the questions you asked yourself. In my preface on page 3, I mentioned that topics like faith, hope, beliefs and values may at first sight seem to belong more in a religious context than in a professional environment. Why then, would people be willing to discuss such personal topics in a professional environment? Well, take it from me: they do. People may find it a little awkward at first, but they are usually very interested to explore and exchange what makes them and their colleagues tick. It helps, that although personal values imply a personal judgment about right and wrong, there is no reward or penalty related to specific personal values in a professional environment. If you are willing to participate in society, it is perfectly OK to be yourself.

Or, as a participant in a values program in southern Europe last year put it:

“This is the first time that we have been given the opportunity by our company to discuss the things in life that are really important to us, not only as employees, but also as human beings. What is also new is that we were provided with a framework to discuss things exactly as they are, and to be completely honest about it. It has also been the first time that my superiors have discussed with me what is important to them – not just as my superiors, but as human beings as well. They were willing to have this dialogue on the basis of perfect equality. The process and the outcome have been very inspiring and, above anything else, it gives us one thing: *Hope*”.

I wish you hope, belief and value(s) in all your endeavors.

Niels-Peter van Doorn, Rotterdam, June 2014

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Disclaimer

Although all the examples in this document are based on real experiences, the names, countries and sectors of the people and organizations involved have been changed and/or combined in different ways for privacy reasons. Any resemblance to real people or organizations should therefore be considered coincidental.

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About the author



Niels-Peter van Doorn (1966) is a Dutch global citizen who was born in Rotterdam and was raised partially in the Dutch Caribbean – thus combining the pragmatism of a big harbor city with the sunny disposition of a life in the tropics. He briefly attended business school and holds a degree in Business Law from Leiden University. During his professional life, Niels-Peter has lived and worked in New York City, the Dutch Caribbean, Belgium, The Netherlands and Italy.

With a keen interest in languages and cultures (currently practicing eight European languages and mastering five of them) every step of his career brought him to a new multi-national working environment. His employers include the AL-Invest secretariat in Brussels, a European Commission program for industrial cooperation between Europe and Latin America. During the late 1990's he was secretary to the Board of Directors at KLM Royal Dutch Airlines. Following his passion for music, he then became Director of Communications for the Dutch National Opera, which in 2000 opened at the Lincoln Center Festival in New York with a spectacular contemporary production on Vermeer.

For the past fifteen years, Niels-Peter has been running a consulting business on strategy development and international cooperation. He has been working throughout Europe with leading organizations in the public, private and arts sector.

Based on a fascination for occupational health, Niels-Peter regularly delivers programs on energy management in organizations and is certified both as a fitness instructor and as a shiatsu practitioner. A music enthusiast, Niels-Peter has also had a near-professional training in classical singing.

Niels-Peter lives with his life partner in Rotterdam, The Netherlands and spends a large portion of his time working with clients at his mountain retreat in the Gran Sasso National Park near Rome, Italy.

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